So You Wanna Meditate

A concise guidebook with commentary on the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra*

Swāmī Anantānanda Giri

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Swāmī Anantānanda Giri, B.Th

To the Guru in you. Blossom; bloom; sing in tune.

OM GAM GAM GAM GAṆAPATAYE NAMAḤ
(Om: Salutations to Lord Ganesha, remover of obstacles.)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The instructions found in chapters 1-4 are freely available online at www.theshivadrishthi.blogspot.com

The translation of the *Vijñāna Bhairava* that I have used for the commentary portion of this book seems to have been authored anonymously. I edited it significantly for typographical errors and re-translated in some places but, mostly, credit is due to this anonymous translator. Whoever you are, thank you.

All this is only Guru's Grace. *Aum Sadgurunāth Mahārāj Kī Jay*! – Victory to the eternal *Guru*, highest of kings!.

So You Wanna Meditate

The method of meditation that I recommend is meditating on the initiatory *māntra* of my lineage, *Auṃ Namaḥ Śivaya* (pronounced: Ohm Nah-MAH SHEE-Vie-Yah).

Sitting or lying, with eyes closed and spine straight, recite the *māntra* internally. Synchronize it with the breath. Repeat the *māntra* once on the inbreath and once on the outbreath. This should initially be done for 15-20 minutes up to 2x/day. Set an alarm so you aren't watching the clock.

You may wish to invest in a set of reusable ear plugs and/or an eye mask to keep out external sound and light. However, we ultimately want you to be able to ". . . . meditate in the center of Grand Central Station," as my *Guru* put it. As such, don't let the accessories become a crutch. Use them for up to three weeks to establish that certain things that are arising from within are, in fact, arising from within.

When you find that your attention has wandered to something other than the *māntra*, which it almost certainly will, be kind to yourself. Know that that is to be expected. Simply acknowledge that attention has slipped and redirect it to the *māntra*. Repeat as often as necessary. If you have to redirect your attention 1,000 times in one sitting, that's OK.

Think of it as an exercise in repeatedly letting go of thoughts and stories. Benefits will certainly come from the exercise. Let there be no

doubt of this and, therefore, don't worry about it. When meditating, we are there for the exercise, not to experience any particular outcome.

Imagine you are at the gym. It's your first day and you're watching your form in the mirror as you perform a set of dumbell curls. Now would you go and get disappointed upon not morphing into Arnold Schwarzenegger before your very eyes as you're doing this? Of course not.

It's equally unrealistic to expect to be transported to another world, experience light phenomena, enter ecstatic states, or achieve "no-mind" early on in your practice. However, if you focus on just getting really into your practice and establishing a good solid momentum, you will hit all these marks without even thinking about them. The trick is to figure out how to like your practice so you will keep going.

The Immediate Benefits

Within a week or two you should begin enjoying the benefits of a more disciplined mind. Detrimental and counter-productive states of mind are essentially habitual thought patterns that people get swept away in. These, in turn, result in behavior that is generally counter-productive to one's own well-being. The mental discipline that meditation imposes breaks up these patterns.

For example, let's say that the water bill always arrives between paydays, normally causing you to get sucked into a vacuum of worry and anxiety. However, on this particular day, you have been practicing the meditation that I have just described to you for a week prior to opening the water bill. This time, you notice the thought, "What if I don't get paid as much as I need to cover my overhead?" Normally a stream of thoughts like, "Man, I'm so scatterbrained at work. My boss hates me. I'm a failure. I'm going to be living in a box by September." would be right on top of the first, snowballing and burying you in an incapacitating sense of anxiety, helplessness, and despair before it would even register that an imaginary story was starting to unfold and that you were buying it.

This time, however, you notice a break in the continuity of the stream of thoughts. Just after the initial thought-reaction to the letter, you find an empty space that isn't normally there. It's small. If you blinked you'd miss it. But it's enough that you have time to notice the first thought,

recognize it for the worthless baggage that it is, and simply let it go; just like you have been practicing letting go of thoughts in meditation. At this point you make use of this new-found free time to go follow up on some leads that later land you two significant contracts at work the next day. Whether this example may or may not describe a specific pattern that you deal with, the thought-reaction mechanism underlying it is universal. It is only the details superimposed over these tendencies and the degree to which people are influenced by them that vary.

Meditation gives us the space to break out of the boxes we shut ourselves into. It gives us a chance to drop the stories that we carry around. What is left in their wake is the opportunity to approach each moment and each situation fresh; free from the influence of the mind's unrelenting chatter.

Beyond Māntra

Protocol for Higher Meditative States

As we have already discussed, the tradition that I represent makes use of *māntra* as a tool for becoming self-realized. It can be used, as described previously, in seated meditation. It can also be repeated mentally throughout the day as often as one can remember to keep it going. The more the better.

In meditation, there are many stages that come and go. Sometimes, if you perform this practice long enough, you will hear a noise arising from within. This is called *nāda*. The ear plugs I recommended in the *So You Wanna Meditate* chapter will make this a lot more obvious when it happens. The inner sounds of *nāda* may take one of many forms. It can sound like a high-pitched hum, like bells, harps, divine music, or thunder just to name a few possibilities. When it becomes consistently audible and uninterrupted, you can drop the *māntra* and give *nāda* your full attention. If at some point it becomes inaudible again, simply go back to the *māntra*.

Other times you may suddenly observe that the māntra is no longer occurring. Then you may also observe that no other thought is arising either. If this happens, just sit in that silence as long as it stays. When thoughts begin to arise again, then you can resume the *māntra* (or go back to *nāda* if that is applicable).

Finally, you may notice unaccounted-for gaps in awareness. You might never notice except that you realize there is "missing time". If this were to happen, you might think you fell asleep if it weren't for the fact that when you came to, you were still sitting upright, had never stopped repeating the *māntra* (you had just stopped being aware of it), or something along those lines. That is called *nirvikalpa samadhi*.

If none of these things has happened yet, just continue to meditate as instructed in the first chapter. They will occur when that becomes necessary in your particular case. If something along these lines occurs, just follow the new protocol and know that you are making good progress.

The Ultimate Goal

The goal is to find the *Śivadṛṣthiḥ*, which literally translates, "outlook of *Śiva*". It is entirely a matter of perspective. *Śiva*,*Brahman*, Consciousness, GOD - or whatever you choose to call it - It is nothing other than yourself. You are nothing other than *Śiva* in all of his freedom, glory, transcendence, and splendor.

Why then is it the experience of most people that this is not the case? Most people are acutely aware of their own limitation. They suffer. Why is this so? Because of the erroneous presumption that they are the ego, the body-mind complex, the personality, the *jīva*, alone. They mistakenly place their faith in the notion of "I" as distinct from "an other".

"GOD exists within you, as you," to quote Baba Muktananda. But, in the case of the average person, *Śiva* is peering out through layers upon layers of caked-on mental conditioning. In this case It sees reality through the distorting lens of duality. Thus, we must not settle for the *idea* that everything is GOD, lest we continue to suffer the ups and downs of gain and loss, joy and sorrow, hope and fear, clinging and rejection, ad infinitum. We must resolve to settle for nothing less than the direct experience, in all of its fullness, that one is nothing other than the Being of which *everything* is an expression.

Then the conviction of the reality of the world is rendered inert like a seed that has been cooked in oil. Our common experience attests that the

world exists, but the unfiltered experience of reality attests to the existence of being something that is *more* real. The *jīva* becomes *Śiva* by merit of this shift in perspective.

We can only see in this way by scraping off the mental conditioning that has accumulated over the course of an unthinkable number of lifetimes. The way that we do this is through *sādhanā*, spiritual practice, AKA *tapasya* (austerities). Along the way, you will have flashes of self-recognition as *Śiva*, peering through a chink in this mental armor, catches a glimpse of himself, the only "thing" that exists. The first glimpses of this that we see are the spaces that I mentioned in the *Immediate Benefits* chapter that break up the continuity between external events and the conditioned responses that tend to follow them.

Eventually, the fire of yoga burns off all of these mental impurities and all that is left is a solitary and blissful *Śiva* dancing in the ashes of his former bondage. You see, the mind throws up a veil. That is what we are used to seeing. But when the veil is torn away, everything is only one unified field; pure Consciousness alone.

Perhaps you can imagine a world where everything is only the Beloved but, just in case you can't, I will tell you what I can. It's beautiful; it is perfect; it is bliss; it is already here; and it is worth the effort to realize this. Whether this is understood or not, the fact remains that this Reality is the sole support of everything that is worth-while in life. I have seen this and, consequentially, the only thing left for me to do in life is to clear out the clutter that keeps me from constantly maintaining this perspective. If you were to see what I have seen (and you can), you would say the same.

The Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra

A Meditation Technique for Every Occasion

By now, you should have a firm grasp of the basics and then some. If you've read and understood the preceding handful of pages, you understand how to sit for meditation and what you can expect to come of that. But meditation isn't limited to your seated practice. In fact, many, many, many people have a natural tendency to perform meditative techniques, perhaps without ever realizing that that is what they are doing.

Even enlightenment experiences aren't all that uncommon. Unfortunately, Western culture gives us little frame of reference for such events. As such, we are not likely to appreciate them or, more importantly, to know how to return to those states of awareness. In this chapter we are going to establish just such a frame of reference. We are going to use it to blur the lines between the sacred and the mundane until, gradually, they become one and the same. To do this, we are going to be looking at an ancient Tantric manuscript called the *Vijñāna Bhairava*.

To understand what we're looking at, we're going to have to get a little technical. Meditation is composed of two elements: *Dhārana* and *dhyāna*. A *dhārana* is a centering technique. *Dhyāna* is the process of keeping one's attention fixed upon that center. In the technique that I taught in the first chapter, the *māntra* is our centering technique (*dhārana*). *Dhyāna* is simply remaining focused on the *māntra* or, failing that,

returning attention to the *māntra* when it wanders. When *nāda* arises (the internal sound mentioned in the chapter titled, *Beyond Māntra*) that becomes our *dhārana* and *dhyāna* becomes our sustained awareness of that instead.

The *Vijñāna Bhairava* lists over one hundred and twelve *dhārana*s. For all of those techniques, there is only one center to be found: Pure, unconditioned Consciousness. In utilizing these *dhārana*s, we are approximating one-pointed awareness on the center of our own Being. Maintaining attention upon our object of meditation by way of *dhyāna*, we become increasingly absorbed in it. Ultimately, the knower, the known, and the knowing merge into one seamless whole. This is the transcendental reality that underlies all else.

Prāṇāyāma

Verses 25-27 describe how to utilize breathing exercises as a centering technique culminating in ". . . .the peace of *Bhairava* [*Śiva*] Consciousness." The tradition that I belong to doesn't make use of *prāṇāyāma* (breath control). Suffice it to say that this is a valid meditation technique, it is just not one that I happen to make use of or teach.

Self-enquiry

Self-enquiry is another technique offered here:

> He (*Bhairava*) is of the nature of undifferentiated Consciousness in all embodied forms. Therefore, those persons who contemplate on all creation pervaded by that Consciousness, transcend relative existence. (v.100)
>
> The supreme Lord, who is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent, verily, I am He. I have the same *Śiva* nature. Contemplating thus with firm conviction, one becomes *Śiva*. (v.109)
>
> The reality of *Bhairava* dwells everywhere, even in ordinary people. By contemplating thus, "There is nothing other than Him," one attains the non-dual state (of homogenous awareness). (v.124)

Subtle Phenomena

Then there is the method of using subtle phenomena as *dhārana*. We already discussed *nāda* in the *Beyond Māntra* chapter. Here's what the *Vij ñāna Bhairava* has to say about this:

> One who is adept in listening to the unstruck sound in *anāhata*, (which is) uninterrupted like a rushing river, attains the supreme state of *Brahman* by mastery of *Śābdabrahman*, the form of *Brahman* as sound. (v.38)

> When one-pointed awareness on the prolonged inner sounds of different musical instruments, such as stringed, wind and percussion, is gradually established, in the end the body becomes the supreme space. (v.41)

Another subtle phenomenon that occurs is called the *bindu*, a blue point of light that appears between and just above the eyebrows. Here, the *Vijñāna Bhairava* describes how to meditate on that:

> By using the hands (as tools) to block the entrances [eyes, ears, and nostrils] in all directions, the eyebrow center is pierced and *bindu* (or light) is seen. Being gradually absorbed within that, the supreme state is realized. (v.36)

The body is animated by a subtle form of energy called *prāna*. When one takes up a spiritual practice, one begins to feel that energy climbing upward toward the crown chakra. The *Vijñāna Bhairava* also tells us how to utilize this phenomenon as a meditation technique.

> By blocking all the channels (of perception) the *prāna-śakti* moves slowly upwards (through the spinal column). At that time, feeling the sensation of an ant crawling in the body, one experiences the supreme bliss. (v.67)

Subtle Energy Centers

We are also told how one may meditate upon the body's subtle energy centers (chakras), either in succession (an expansion on the preceding concept) or individually:

> (Meditate on that *Śakti*) moving upwards like lightning through all the chakras one by one to the *dvādaśānta* [the crown chakra in this case]. Then at last the glorious form of *Bhairava* dawns. (v.29)

The twelve (centers [chakras]) should be pierced successively through proper understanding of their (associated) twelve letters. Thus becoming liberated from the gross then the

subtle, one by one, at the end (of its journey) the *kuṇḍalinī* becomes *Śiva*. (v.30)

> Having closed the eyes, and fixing the attention at the crown of the head, gradually stabilize the mind and direct it toward the goal, which will become discernible. (v.34)
>
> One should meditate on the inner space of the medial *nādi* (*suṣumna*) situated in the central axis of the body (the spinal column), which is as slender as the fiber of a lotus stem, and then by the grace of *Devi* [Goddess], the divine (form) is revealed. (v.35)

To paraphrase, one can either meditate on the movement of subtle energy up the spine or on the infinite space within the central channel of the body's subtle nervous system. Sustained and focused attention on either will surely take one to the goal.

Space/Void

Speaking of space, this is the single most persistent theme to be found in the manuscript. This is because the thought-free absorption of *Nirvikalpa saṃādhi* leads one to self-realization. Therefore, in focusing awareness upon the qualities of space, emptiness, and void – even via the agency of thought – awareness is led beyond even the thought that brought it there.

> All the directions should be contemplated upon simultaneously in one's own body as space or void. The mind, being free from all thoughts, becomes dissolved (in the vacuous space of Consciousness). (v.43)
>
> One who contemplates simultaneously on the void of the back (spinal column) and the void of the root [chakra] becomes void-minded (completely free of all thought constructs or *vikalpas*) by that energy which is independent of the body. (v.44)
>
> By steady contemplation on the void of the back (*suṣumna*), the void of the root [chakra] and the void of the heart simultaneously, there arises the state of *nirvikalpa*, which is free from thought constructs. (v.45)
>
> If one concentrates on the body as a void, even for a moment, with the mind free from thought, then one attains thoughtlessness and verily becomes that form of void (known as *Bhairava*). (v.46)
>
> O gazelle-eyed one, concentrate upon all the constituents of the body pervaded by space, so that the thought becomes steady. (v.47)
>
> One should contemplate on the skin of the body as a mere wall or partition with nothing inside it. By meditating thus, he becomes like the void, which cannot be meditated upon. (v.48)

Visualization of Immolation

Another technique offered by the *Vijñāna Bhairava* is to use a visualization as our *dhārana*. We are given the option of either visualizing ourselves being consumed by fire or, instead (or perhaps additionally), visualizing the entire universe consumed by fire.

> One should contemplate that one's own body has been burnt by the fire arising from the movement of time. Then at last one will experience tranquility. (v.52)
>
> In the same way, having meditated with an unwavering and one-pointed mind on the entire universe being burnt, that man becomes a Godman or attains the Supreme State of Manhood. (v.53)

The symbolic significance of this visualization is that the body and the universe are merely transitory expressions of the infinite and timeless *Śiva*. In the wake of their dissolution, One remembers his or her true identity as *Śiva* as there is nothing else left to grab onto. Fortunately, *Śiva* is bliss and, as *Śiva*, One is content to dance in the ashes of all that was once erroneously identified with. But the symbolism used here, as rich as it might be, is only an aid to practice and understanding its purpose.

Regardless of what symbols we do or do not incorporate into our meditation, we can witness the Reality indicated by the symbols by following any of these *dhāranas* to its ultimate conclusion via *dhyāna*.

> One attains the state of *Bhairava* if established in even one of these (one hundred and twelve *dhāranas*) and, by his speech, he confers blessings or curses. (v.140)

In fact, there are many everyday situations that can be utilized as *dhāranas* that most people would never guess could be used in such a way. And why the hell not? As the *Vij*

ñāna *Bhairava* itself points out:

> Wherever the mind goes, whether inward or outward, everywhere there is only *Śiva*. Since *Śiva* is omnipresent, where can the mind go to avoid him? (v.116)

"The Bliss of a Woman"

Being *Śiva* is a joyous affair. So why shouldn't we be able to find *Śiva* in our enjoyment?

> O Queen of Gods, the bliss of a woman is attained even in the absence of *Śakti* [a double etendre meaning both a woman, and anything belonging to the phenomenal world]. By fully remembering and absorbing the mind in the experience of kissing, hugging and embracing, the bliss swells. (v.70)

Even the joy of sex is a portion of the bliss that is *Śiva*. Having said that, I should clarify that sex is probably the single trickiest issue on the road to self-realization. The reasons for this are twofold:

1. Depletion of sexual fluid equates to the depletion of a bodily fluid called *ojas*, which is made from the former and stored in the marrow of the bones. Generally, one cannot reach certain higher states of Consciousness if *ojas* is depleted. Additionally, the *ojas* acts as a sort of buffer for *tejas*, the inner fire of yoga. If one intends to do any high-level spiritual practice, the fire gets intense. It will burn a person up who is without sufficient *ojas*. There are Tantric techniques that people sometimes utilize to have sexual intercourse while retaining the sexual fluid. However, most people don't have the inclination or the will power to accomplish

such a feat. And even those who do may very well get hung up on the next potential issue.

2. Attachment! For most people, sex is the result of very deeply ingrained habitual mental patterns (*saṃskāras*). Put in the simplest of terms, pretty much everybody has something that, "puts them in the mood." When that particular stimulus (whatever it may be) occurs and the opportunity is there, people generally have sex. Not only that, but they generally do it very compulsively; as if something other than him or herself were manning the controls, causing the act and the events leading up to it to happen. This may not be apparent most of the time because people generally want sex more often than they have the opportunity to actually get it (of course this is coming from a man; feel free to disagree on this point). However, when one decides that that they don't want to have sex for whatever reason, following through is often easier said than done. Old habits die hard and this is the oldest of habits. The purpose of the yogi's work is to achieve liberation. An individual who is a slave to their genitals is not someone who is free.

Contrary to what some would have you believe, one can be on the spiritual path and have a sex life. Contrary to what many others believe, one can completely abstain from sex without incurring any injury; physical, mental, or otherwise. I am not going to tell the general reader which route to take. My advice is short and sweet: find and accept a *Guru* as your own. If you want to get enlightened, you're going to need to be shown the way by someone who has reached the goal him or herself, who is well versed in the scriptures of *Sanātana Dharma*, and who has the ability to teach (not everybody does). A *Guru* with these qualifications will show you the specific path that you are going to need to take. Your path will be quite different from the next person's, even though the destination is the same. After all, your starting point is one-of-a-kind!

We will discuss the import of the *Guru* further but, for now, it is time to end this digression and return to the subject of *dhāranas*;

specifically *dhārana* in the form of joy.

Joy in General

> When great joy is obtained (through any event such as) meeting with relatives, one should meditate on that with one-pointedness, until the mind becomes absorbed and the bliss ever arises. (v.71)
>
> If one concentrates on eating and drinking and the happiness obtained by that joy of taste, from such contemplation of enjoyment arises the state of fullness, which then becomes supreme joy or bliss. (v.72)
>
> As a result of concentration on the pleasures of the senses, such as music or song, the yogis experience equal happiness (or pleasure) within. By being (thus) absorbed the yogi ascends beyond the mind and becomes one with That (the Supreme). (v.73)

It is true that life's little joys aren't the totality of the bliss of unconditioned Consciousness. However, "There is nothing that is not GOD," as my *Guru* is known to say. Furthermore, it is worth restating that pretty much anything can serve as a *dhārana* which one may follow all the way back to Source through *dhyāna*.

Absorption in Anything

> Wherever there is mindful awareness, either on the void, or on another (object such as a) wall, or on an excellent person (such as a *Guru*), gradually the boon of absorption into the Self is granted. (v. 33)
>
> Whenever there is satisfaction of mind and the mind is held there alone, the nature of supreme bliss manifests. (v.74)

This is my favorite part of the *Vijñāna Bhairava*. This is where the *dhāranas* become super ordinary. Simply by maintaining awareness – either on anything you could think of or on nothingness itself – one can meditate upon the Self. You can meditate on the void or on your Guru. You can meditate upon satisfaction itself. Hell, you can even meditate on a wall! For me, this is what is so appealing about the *dhāranas* introduced to us by the *Vijñāna Bhairava*: their unabashed accessibility. There is, in fact, nothing holier than the realization of the Divinity of the apparently profane; the sublimation of the mundane.

> By entering that state preceding sleep, where the awareness of the outer world has faded, (the mind is absorbed in the threshold state) which the Supreme Goddess illumines. (v.75)

Yep, sleep; another very ordinary centering technique. But, then again, sleep is a really weird thing when you think about it. Every day our whole world disappears, only to reappear in the morning. Sometime after the dissolution of the waking state, we create our own world out of mind-stuff. This is more commonly known as dreaming. The world of the waking state isn't so different. It is the mental creation of *Śiva*, or so the scriptures say. According to this verse of the *Vijñāna Bhairava*, straddling these two states affords us the opportunity to plunge deeply into the state of thought-free awareness.

> O Goddess, as a result of slowly swinging or rocking the body, one attains a tranquil state of mind and floats into the stream of Divine Consciousness. (v.83)

Have you ever noticed how soothing babies find the motion of rocking? Is it a coincidence that people who are highly agitated and/or distressed sometimes instinctively drop their seat, simulating the fetal position, and begin rocking themselves? This sensation of weightlessness causes remembrance, to varying degrees, of a state prior to and more peaceful than the individuation experienced in worldly existence.

When I was a kid, my dad used to drive my brother, my sister, and me to an area near where we lived that had a lot of very steep hills. We called them "'Wheee!' Hills," because that is what we would say when he would speed up enough, immediately prior to the crest of the hill, that we would catch air going down the other side. We loved that weightless sensation. I also specifically remember feeling what I now know to be *prāna* that was moving around in my lower chakras. To this day, I make a point of experiencing weightless-ness whenever the opportunity presents itself. I don't really go in for the stunt driver sort of stuff that my dad likes now that I'm the one behind the wheel. But if I see a swing set, let me tell you: I get on that bad mamma-jamma and I get centered!

> Whirling the body round and round until it falls on the ground makes the energy causing commotion at once (become static). By that cessation the Supreme State appears. (v.111)

I figure if it's good enough for the kids, it's good enough for the dervishes (google it), and it's good enough for the *Vijñāna Bhairava*, then it's good enough for me. I can't get enough of whirling around like a

freakin' tornado. I'm not even joking. Children are good people to hang around with because this affords you the opportunity to go to the park and do these kinds of things without having to worry about being committed to a place with locked doors and padded walls.

> At first one should pierce any limb of the body a little bit with a sharp, pointed needle or any other instrument. Then projecting the Consciousness there, verily there is movement towards the pure nature of *Bhairava*. (v.93)

Even pain can be a *dhārana*. I happen to know several women who are advocates of natural (drug-free, non-surgical) childbirth. Because of this, I have become aware of a particular phenomenon among many women who have had this experience. In short, they talk about it with all the fervor of one who has under-gone a transformative religious experience – because they have! In that situation, you don't really have any option but to be fully there with the physical pain of childbirth. Of course, as we have already learned, one-pointedness on anything leads to the experience of the transcendent Reality beyond whatever particular starting point you're working with.

> At the beginning and end of sneezing, in terror, sorrow or confusion, when fleeing from a battlefield, during (keen) curiosity, or at the onset or appease-ment of hunger, that state is the external existence of *Brahman*. (v.117)

These are natural gaps in the continuity of the mind's normal functioning. Capitalize on them! Hold onto that thought-free awareness with all of the atten-tion that you can muster!

Varying Levels of Sādhanā

So, to recap, we've just run through a bunch of very accessible *dhāranas*. However, it is worth noting that "centering" is a relative term. Generally speaking, people who have had any experience with any of these *dhāranas* find them joyful, soothing, or beneficial in some way, just by merit of the general shift of awareness toward Source. That is because Source is the sum total of all bliss; of all peace. Usually though, especially with these *dhāranas* that are performed instinctively, people do not know to couple them with *dhyāna*. People figure out that they can recharge their batteries a little bit here and there by way of dipping the toes of attention into the pool of interior awareness, so to speak, but don't take the full plunge of

completely merging knower, known, and knowing before becoming distracted and delegating attention elsewhere. This is the typical *sādhanā* of John and Joan Q. Public.

Other people regularly put in the conscious work of deepening their absorption in the object of meditation through *dhyāna.* These folks experience a correspondingly greater portion of the bliss and peace of the Absolute. But this isn't a cookie-cutter type of thing. Different people are going to experience bliss, peace, etc. to varying degrees even when capitalizing on self-effort. It will always be effort well spent, but where an hour of meditation takes you isn't necessarily where it will take me. Even still, all individual variation being accounted for, self-effort alone is not enough at the end of the day. It is not enough to cause one to fully and permanently merge into the Absolute.

It is only by Divine Grace that the pull of attention toward the inner Self becomes greater than the pull of attention outward, toward the world. This Grace can only be obtained through the compassionate blessing of a living Master; one who has realized the Self him or herself and who is stable in the recognition of That. There are people who spontaneously become fully and permanently enlightened. This happened to Rāmana Mahāṛṣi, for example. Although he never had a *Guru* in this life, he obviously recognized the value of the *Guru*. I can say this definitively because of how obvious his utter detachment from the world was and because of the fact that he served others in the capacity of *Guru*. As I hinted just a moment ago, I also believe that he must have had a *Guru* in his previous incarnation. Regardless of whether I am right or wrong on this point, the fact is that the vast majority of people are utterly unable to achieve such a herculean feat on their own.

I actually have had the experience of the oneness of everything for myself, and this did happen prior to my meeting my *Guru* in this life. This experience of merging with GOD is called *saṃādhi*. When it becomes effortless and permanent, it is called *sahāja saṃādhi*. I was not able to stay with that awareness or return at will. I shot right back down to earth, so to speak. Somehow I simultaneously felt that I had never been closer to, nor further from the Truth.

I knew how to meditate by then and I spent at least a year trying to return to that level of awareness on my own. I found that I was unable to. Having performed *sādhanā* extensively both with and without a *Guru*, I can tell you that, working with my *Guru*, habitual thoughts and behaviors have been burned off at an exponential rate. I used to yo-yo back and forth from high *saṃādhi* experiences to very low states of Consciousness characterized by depression and apathy. Now *saṃādhi* often flashes forth from within spontaneously. I maintain a pretty even-keeled state of awareness that is usually characterized by something along the spectrum of contentment to bliss. Jesus addressed this phenomenon by saying, "When you are near me, you are near the fire. When you are far from me, you are far from the Kingdom." (*Coptic Gospel of Thomas*, L. 82)

At any rate, whether you want to take my word for it or not, the *Vijñāna Bhairava* itself states that its teachings are only meant for those who are under the guidance of a self-realized Master, and who meet certain other qualifying factors:

> These teachings should not be disclosed to other disciples, to those who are evil and cruel, or to those who have not surrendered to the feet of the *Guru*. (They should only be revealed) to advanced souls, who are self-controlled and whose minds are free of *vikalpas* [thoughts]. (v.158)

The *Śiva Sutras* succinctly state, "The *Guru* is the means." (2:6). The *Guru* makes all the difference in the world for one whose goal is to take these *dhāranas* from the realm of fleeting feel-good sensations to the full and permanent realization of one's own intrinsic *Śiva* nature.

The saints are alive and well and their doors are open for those who have sincerely resolved to pursue the Truth until it is found. Make use of your advantage. Don't squander the auspicious gift of your human birth cherishing only the fleeting reflections of the Real. Abandon your longing and sorrow. Meditate on the Self and see, for yourself, the peace that is resting in the knowledge of yourself.

OM TAT SAT

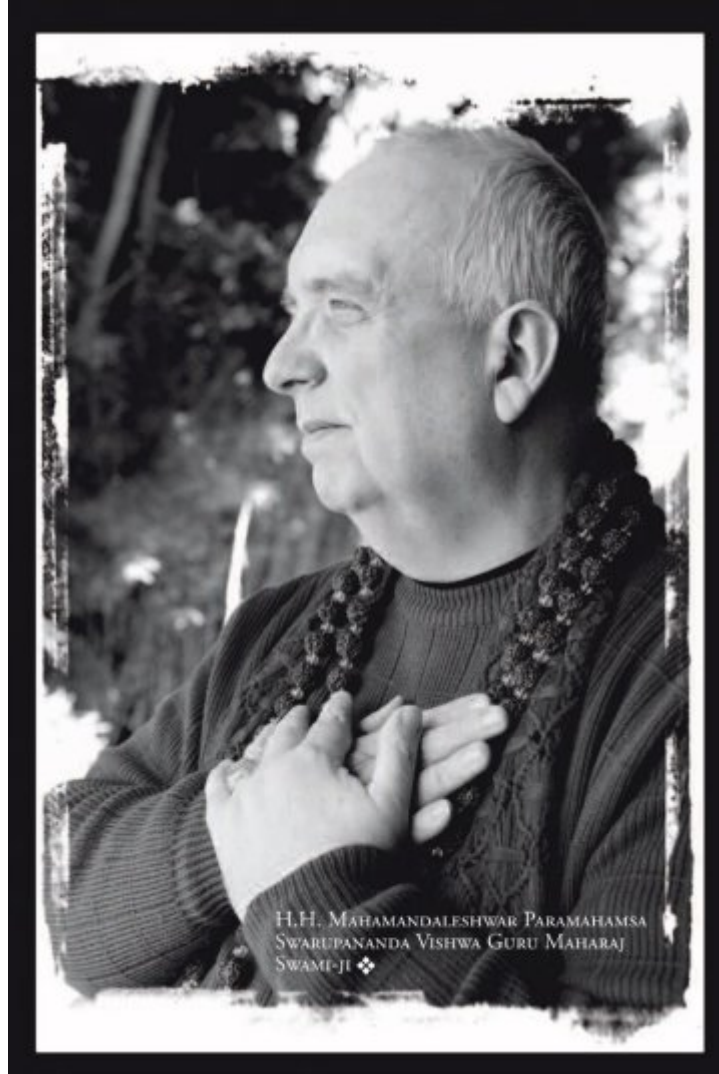
(OM: That Truth-Absolute)

Open Invitation

You are hearby invited to take this teaching to the next level and begin benefitting from the influence of the *Guru*'s Grace. My *Guru* is Mahamandaleshwar Swarupananda, a fully enlightened being: a *siddha*. Despite having realized all that is to be realized, he remains ever the humble disciple of his own *Sadguru*, Baba Muktananda.

Empowered by Lord *Śiva* himself, this lineage of *Śaktipat* Masters stretches back, in unbroken succession, to the beginning of time. With a sincere longing in your heart, the resolve to settle for nothing short of the highest of truths, and the guidance and protection of those who have merged into the All, how can you fail? Most people of a religious bent have to content themselves with a system that occupies itself fighting over the chalice. You have in your hands the opportunity to drink deeply of its contents.

To begin working with the lineage in this way, simply begin putting the techniques detailed in this handbook into practice. As you are first starting out, e-mail me daily reports. As we establish a rapport and you settle into a comfortable groove, I will give you the cue to cut that down to weekly reports. Carbon copy all messages to the *Guru* (place his email address in the "cc" field in all outbound messages). The subject heading should read either, *Daily Sadhana Update* or *Weekly Sadhana Update*, depending on which is applicable in your particular case at that particular time. In this way, I will guide your practice, perhaps with the occasional

input of Guruji. As such, you will receive all of the merit associated with *Guru Mārga*, the path of the *Guru*.

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Pronunciation of Sanskrit Characters

Vowels

a as in b*u*t, c*u*p; *ā* as in c*a*lm, f*a*ther
i as in b*i*t, s*i*t; *ī* as in s*ee*n, m*ea*n
u as in p*u*t, f*oo*t; *ū* as in r*oo*m, mood
e as in p*a*y, s*a*y; *o* as in l*oa*n
ai as in h*a*y, m*ai*se;
au, as in b*ou*gh, n*o*w;
ṛ, a semi-vowel, pronounced like a rolled *r* with a short *u* sound following it;
A tilde, ~, over a vowel indicates that it should be pronounced nasally.

Consonants

c as in su*ch*;
ś as in shine, *sh*ower;
ṣ is pronounced like *ś* except that the tip of the tongue is bent back to touch the roof of the mouth;
t, *d*, and *n* are pronounced with the tip of the tongue against the top teeth;
ṭ, *ḍ*, and *ṇ* are pronounced with the tip of the tongue bent back to touch the roof of the mouth;
ñ as in onion; *jñ* as dnya or gnya;
When consonants are followed by *h*, they should be aspirated;
ḥ at the end of a sentence indicates that the previous vowel is echoed

GLOSSARY

Advaita: Literally means “non-dual.” All *Advaita* schools of philosophy are inherently monistic.

Ahaṃkāra: ego; the “I”-maker. The psychic instrument responsible for the identification with the limited body-mind complex.

Bhairava: Consciousness-absolute; an epithet of Lord *Śiva*.

Bindu: The point which contains the universe; the brilliant blue light perceived in meditation between and just above the eyebrows.

Brahmā: The first manifestation of Consciousness. Hinduism’s creator-god

Brahman: Pure, undifferentiated, unobscured Consciousness.

Cākra: (Lit. “wheel”). Subtle/astral energy center responsible for the processing of *prāṇa*. Listed in descending order, they are:

Sahasrāra: The topmost, seventh, or crown *cākra*; “The thousand-petaled lotus.”

Ājna: The brow *cākra*, or "third eye."

Viśuddhi: The throat *cākra*.

Anāhata: The heart *cākra*.

Maṇipura: The solar plexus *cākra*.

Svādiṣṭhāna: The navel *cākra*.

Mulādhāra: The "root" *cākra*, located at the base of the spine.

Dhāraṇa: Concentration; upon a specific object or place (i.e.: *māntra*, energy center, *Guru*); one-pointedness.

Dharma: The Way; Righteousness; Justice; Truth.

Dhyāna: Meditation; Sustained concentration, maintained or repeatedly returned to the object of meditation (i.e.: *māntra*, energy center, Guru).

Dvādaśānta: Literally, "the peace of twelve". As it appears in the text, it is synonymous with the *sahasrāra* (crown chakra), being referenced in conjunction with a 12-chakra model. The system of seven major chakras is more commonly known. In fact, the human body has many many more energy centers than that, but these are considered major chakras. The 12-chakra system simply refers to five more of these as "major". *Dvāda-śānta* is more commonly used to refer to the twelve fingers' distance, both from the tip of the nose (outer *dvādaśānta*), and from the heart (inner *dvādaśānta*). These are used as reference points in *prānāyāma*.

Guru: Can refer broadly to any teacher. Herein, it specifically refers to a self-realized Master who imparts his realization to others (see also, *Sadguru*).

Guru Param-parā: The tradition of the Guru-disciple relationship and succession.

Jīva: Atomic or individuated unit of Consciousness.

Jñāna: Knowledge.

Kuṇḍalinī: "Serpent Power"; The primal life-force energy which, when awakened, travels up the spine, raising the consciousness of the individual; From the root verb: *kuṇḍ*—to burn.

Māntra: A phonetic formula, the intonation of which has the power to draw one's attention inward and burn off latent mental conditioning; also collectively referred to as the names of GOD.

Mārga: Path.

Nāda: The inner Divine sound that comes into the foreground of awareness, generally as a result of *sādhanā*.

Nirvikalpa: Free of thought or any perceived separation whatsoever.

Ojas: Radiant yellow fluid produced in the marrow of the bones which is preserved by practicing sexual continence and which assists in the process of self-realization.

OM: Consciousness-absolute-as-soud: the first manifestation from pure, undifferentiated Consciousness; analogous to *Brahmā*.

Prāṇa: Subtle life-force energy.

Sadguru: A self-realized Master who imparts his realization to others.

Sādhaka: One who performs *sādhanā*.

Sādhanā: The disciplined practice which leads to self-realization. From the verb root: *sādh*—to go straight to the goal.

Sahāja: Natural; effortless: as in, *sahāja saṃādhi*.

Sahaṣhrāra: See, *cākra*.

Śaivism: Any of various systems in which the Absolute is worshipped in the form of *Śiva.*

Śakti: *Śiva*'s consort; the infinite power of *Śiva*; all manifestations.

Śaktipat: The transmission of the *Guru Śakti* to the seeker; Can occur spontaneously or as directed by *Guru*'s will; Can occur in the *Guru*'s physical presence or at a distance.

Saṃādhi: The state of being merged in the Self.

Saṃskāra: Mental conditioning; a latent impression.

Sanātana Dharma: Literally, The Eternal Way; more commonly known as Hinduism but distinct from most "-isms" in that it is not dependent upon any particular precepts, prohibitions, or rituals. Competent exponents of *Sanātana Dharma* universally acknowledge its roots in the mystic work of self-realization which, further, hinges upon *Guru-paramparā*.

Śiva: "The benevolent one"; A particular aspect of Consciousness-absolute; A divine incarnation with the appearance of an ascetic with long, matted locks, and clothed in a tiger skin; The destroyer-god of the Hindu Trimūrthi: destroyer of impediments to self-realization.

Śivadṛṣtiḥ: The outlook or perspective of *Śiva*.

Suṣumṇa: The central nervous channel of the spine. Of the 101 *nādīs*, or subtle nervous channels emanating from the heart, the *suṣumṇa* is the most important. It is the channel that leads *Kuṇḍalinī* from the *Mūlādhāra* to the *Sahasrāra*.

Tapas/Tapasya: Austerity or sacrifice which contributes to the burning off of residual karma. Often equated to suffering, it actually promotes happiness in the face of adversity.

Tejas: Fire; for our purposes, we are referring specifically to the inner fire of yoga.

Vikalpa: Thought; any perceived distinction as between subject and object, knower and known, etc.